



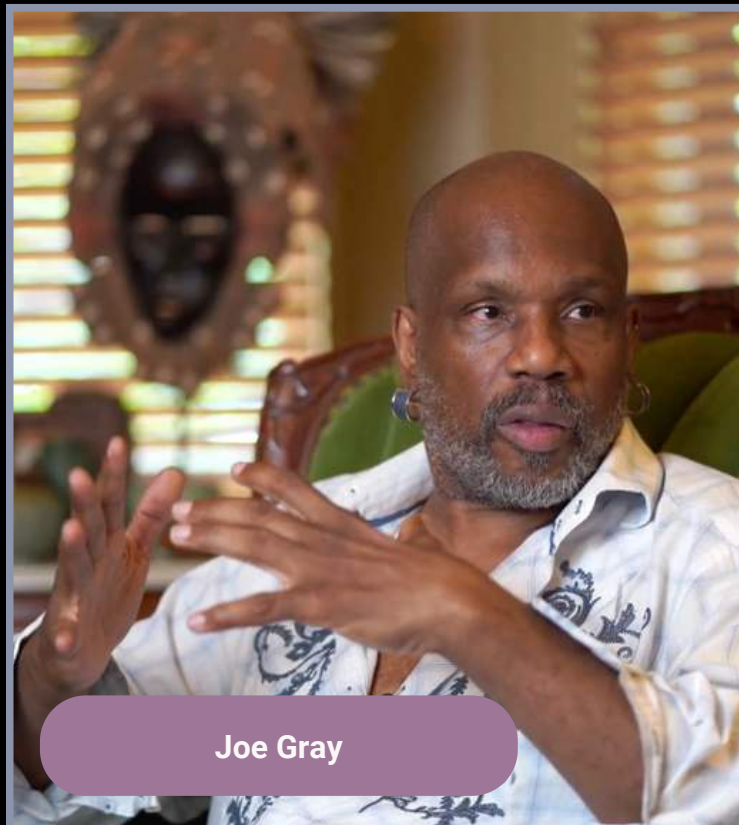
Rev. Canon Carla Robinson



Doug Houck



Lin Melone



Joe Gray

MANY PARTS, ONE BODY: STORIES OF OLDER QUEER CHRISTIANS (A VIDEO SERIES)

REFLECTION GUIDE



ORIENTED
to LOVE



CHRISTIANS for
SOCIAL ACTION



ORIENTED
to LOVE

"God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it."

1 Cor. 12:24-26

Why "Many Parts, One Body"? Oriented to Love invites Christians to lean across difference with the posture of a learner, to listen deeply to those we consider our theological, sexual, or gender "other." Together, we open our hearts to the stories of those who may disrupt our own narratives of who God is or what love looks like. While not abandoning our convictions, we can lay down our arguments, loosening our grip so that another's experience might expand our understanding of what it means to follow Jesus faithfully.

Most LGBTQ+ Christians growing up and coming out in the late 20th-century American church were offered limited and often dangerous options: invisibility in the closet, "treatment" via exorcism or reparative therapy, expulsion. While the consequences of misunderstanding, rejection, and psychological harm run deep, many of these LGBTQ+ Christians have clung to their faith in spite of this treatment, bravely persisting in their faithfulness, forgiveness, and witness to Christ's love.

We have much to learn from these forerunners. What their journeys reveal is not only historically significant but also highly relevant today. What once looked like a growing tide of LGBTQ+ acceptance has seen a drastic shift in recent years. A socio-political backlash and wave of anti-queer legislation have made it all the more urgent that we learn from the stories of those who have gone before. In many communities in the US (and abroad) today, suppression, scapegoating, and violence are a present reality for people who identify as LGBTQ+.

We share these stories as a resource for the church, so that we might better understand the cost of dismissing, excluding, or vilifying our LGBTQ+ siblings in Christ. This isn't about promoting a certain theology but rather about affirming the humanity of all God's children – listening to, learning from, and caring for all. It's also a call to recognize that *we are all poorer when we avoid those who are different from us.*

We invite you to listen to and engage with this series of videos in which older LGBTQ+ Christians share their stories of coming out in the church decades ago, the challenges they faced, and how they were able to cling to Jesus, who is ever faithful. We hope you take a few minutes after listening to reflect on the questions we provide, and we encourage you to be as honest as possible with yourself – and with your conversation partners, if you decide to use these with a group – in order to deepen your learning. Thanks for listening!

Rev. Canon Carla Robinson: “I couldn't walk away from Jesus”

The Rev. Canon Carla Robinson is Canon for Multicultural Ministry and Community Transformation at the Episcopal Diocese of Olympia in Washington.

Carla’s world crumbled when, coming out as transgender, she was to leave the pastorate. Although that was a devastating experience, what she learned along the way prepared her for a new kind of ministry.

Questions for reflection:

1. What stood out to you as you listened to Carla's story? What about her story...
...surprised you?
...unsettled you?
...delighted you?
...challenged you?
2. What new questions does Carla's story raise for you? What are you curious about?
3. Think of a time when you were excluded. How did that experience impact your spiritual, emotional, mental, physical health? What did you do with that?
4. Think of times when you experience inclusion. How do these impact your spiritual, emotional, mental, physical health?
5. Who is someone you are tempted to exclude—from your circle, your love, your prayers? What compels you to keep them at bay? What might you risk/gain if you let them in?
6. Think of someone you've hurt who you might need to ask for forgiveness. What would it look like for you to "hug the porcupine"?
7. What do you think allowed Carla to cling to Jesus in spite of her spiritual crisis? What helps you cling to him when you are in a season of pain, doubt, confusion?

Learn more about Oriented to Love dialogues and find resources on listening, learning, and loving across deep difference at ChristiansforSocialAction.org/programs/oriented-to-love/

Doug Houck: “I paid a price in trying to conform”

Doug Houck (he/him) lives in Tacoma, WA. A retired management analyst for the National Park Service, Doug enjoys international travel and walking long distance trails such as the Via Francigena and the Camino Santiago. He is involved with Tacoma Mature Men, a social activities organization for senior gay men, and an active member of Urban Grace Church.

Doug’s experience with ex-gay ministries took a toll on his mental, spiritual, and relational health. He shares how he’s been building a more joyful, integrated life over the past decade.

Questions for reflection:

1. What feelings arise in you as you listen to Doug share his story? What, if anything, do those feelings activate in you?
2. To what extent can you relate to Doug's temptation to hide himself, as he did in his new church, in 2017? What parts of yourself do you keep out of sight? What do you think the risk or reward would be if you shared your whole self?
3. Identify someone you know right now who you suspect doesn't feel valued, or who seems lonely. How could you convey their value, put flesh on God's unconditional love for them? What could you do to include them, not just as an afterthought, but in a real way, "as if" they were a family member?
4. In your faith community, who is included in leadership, and who is excluded? Think of as many examples as you can, and feel free to think broadly here (eg, children are likely excluded from leadership, etc.) What are those decisions based on? Which decisions do you affirm? Which, if any, do you struggle with, and why?
5. Doug talks about what the broader church needs to do to heal the damage done to God's LGBTQ+ children. Of the suggestions he makes – repenting, lamenting, fighting for full inclusion of queer people, looking at Scripture through their eyes, etc – which, if any, do you think your current faith community would be willing to consider? If your faith community already does these things, what impact has it had on your church, and what ideas would you add to this list?

Lin Melone: “Queer folks are already here in the church”

Lin Melone serves on the preaching-teaching team of Church of the Sojourners in San Francisco, an intentional Christian community, and on the EDI Council for Q Christian Fellowship. She’s the queer mom of a grown son from a former mixed-orientation marriage, and a co-leader of the Bay Area Revoice chapter.

Lin talks about theological closets and calls the church to lean across deep difference to learn from those we disagree with or don’t understand. She highlights especially the gifts offered by those on the margins.

Questions for reflection:

1. What stood out to you as you listened to Lin’s story?

What about Lin’s story...

...surprised you?

...delighted you?

...challenged you?

2. Lin describes multiple “coming out” events – about her sexuality, but also about her theology – knowing, in each instance, that she was risking rejection. What kinds of closets have you had to “come out” of? This can be any kind of difficult conversation or revelation about something you suspect might invite disapproval or even rejection? What was that like for you?

3. Lin talks about what she believes ‘traditional’ and ‘progressive’ faith communities can learn from each other. In your experience, what are the rewards of being open to people who hold different theological understandings from yours? What are the risks of staying in our siloes? What do you think is required for Christians to relate to and love each other well across difference?

4. “The view is always different from the margins.” When have you experienced being on the margins, in some way, and what did you see from that vantage point? What have you learned from people who experience marginalization in a different way from you?

5. Lin talks about her friend’s idea of “queer treasure.” How does that expression land for you? Reflect on any treasure you’ve identified in or through LGBTQ+ people in your life.

Joe Gray: “You create your own closet”

Joe Gray spearheaded a CDC-funded outreach program to the faith-based community in Seattle and Tacoma (WA) in the 1990s, one of the first in the nation to tap the Black church as an effective tool for reducing AIDS in the Black community and addressing the unique needs of Black gay men who were estranged from or cast out by the church of their youth. Today he lives with his husband back in Philadelphia, where he grew up.

Joe unpacks the cost of both external and internal closets. Sharing how he was eventually able to integrate his faith with his journey as a gay man, he calls the church to choose love over judgment.

Questions for reflection:

1. Joe tried many things to hide who he was – pretending to be straight, presenting himself as a foreigner, lying to his parents. He even hid from himself. As Joe says, the impetus is strong to climb into the closet and stay there. When/what have you been tempted to hide when you felt you didn’t fit in? What parts of yourself do you keep out of sight? What do you think the risk or reward would be if you shared your whole self?

2. Consider some of the earlier influences Joe had in his life and the conflicting desires/plans they had for him: each of his parents, his siblings, his house mother and the academic leadership at Dallas Theological Seminary, etc. How does hearing their various expectations for him and responses to his sexuality bring up for you? How have you dealt with others’ conflicting expectations of you?

3. Joe talks about resenting that his sister “didn’t have to come out about her boyfriend.” What other privileges come to mind that cisgender heterosexuals likely take for granted that LGBTQ+ people don’t have?

4. As an AIDS activist, Joe started an organization to mobilize people of faith to minister to AIDS patients. To what extent have you found ways to integrate your faith with your employment, volunteer work, or other day-to-day parts of your life? In what ways have you seen suffering in your life bear fruit in unexpected ways?